



**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS  
Veterans Health Administration  
Washington DC 20420**

**IL 10-2004-003**

In Reply Refer To: 111

**February 25, 2004**

**UNDER SECRETARY FOR HEALTH'S INFORMATION LETTER**

**EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVE FOR VETERANS: "TIME IS LIFE FOR  
TREATING HEART ATTACK"**

**1. Purpose.** This Under Secretary for Health's Information Letter provides guidance regarding participation in the new Cardiac Educational Initiative called "Time is Life for Treating Heart Attack," to be implemented during February 2004. As a veterans' health educational initiative, the goals are for veterans to have a personal survival plan and to seek medical attention, as quickly as possible, when acute myocardial infarction (AMI), heart attack, symptoms first occur. VHA has developed several educational resources that can be used to enhance facility cardiac care educational programs.

**2. Background**

a. Approximately three million veterans are considered high-risk for AMI. Fourteen thousand male veterans and two hundred female veterans seek treatment for AMI at Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) facilities each year.

b. VA contracted with researchers from Harvard Medical School and Price Waterhouse Coopers to evaluate the health outcomes of veterans treated for AMI. The study compared mortality rates for VA and Medicare heart attack patients between 1997 and 1999. Results identified a higher-mortality rate among VA patients at 30 days and at 1, 2, and 3-years after a heart attack. Another significant finding indicated that veterans driving 30 minutes or longer after the onset of AMI symptoms delayed receipt of life-saving treatment. This has resulted in the development of facility and Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) action plans for cardiac care to include patient education regarding heart attacks and the importance in developing a personal survival plan.

c. Current AMI treatment programs include early opening of the infarct-related artery by either pharmacological or mechanical intervention. Thrombolytic therapy is associated with an overall 25 to 30 percent reduction in AMI mortalities. Overall, better cardiovascular outcomes occur when a patient seeks medical attention early, i.e., when symptoms first occur, and when treatment is initiated within 1 hour of heart attack symptoms. Early treatment saves lives, i.e., "Time is Life."

**3. The "Time is Life for Treating Heart Attack" Educational Initiative.** The "Time is Life for Treating Heart Attack" Educational Initiative was developed to assist clinicians in

encouraging veterans to develop a personal AMI survival plan and to seek medical attention as quickly as possible after symptoms first appear. VA is committed to implementing an aggressive patient education initiative to assist veterans and significant others to:

- a. Recognize the signs and/or symptoms of a heart attack,
- b. Call 911 for initiation of early treatment and emergency transport to a VA or non-VA facility, and
- c. Develop a personal survival plan in partnership with their health care provider for early intervention, if and when heart attack symptoms occur.

**4. Target Audience.** All veterans enrolled in primary care and cardiology clinics, who:

- a. Have had electrocardiogram changes;
- b. Are over 65;
- c. Are smokers;
- d. Have abnormal biomarkers and/or abnormal left ventricular function;
- e. Have documented coronary artery disease (CAD);
- f. Have hypertension and/or diabetes; and/or
- g. Have a CAD family history and are targeted for participation in this program.

**5. Veterans and Providers' Cardiac Education Materials**

- a. The new "Time is Life" products developed for this initiative include:
  - (1) A "Time is Life" brochure in English and Spanish.
  - (2) A "Time is Life" wallet card in English and Spanish.
  - (3) A Risk Assessment Action Plan.
  - (4) A "Time is Life" poster.
  - (5) "Combat Heart Attack and Survive Time is Life" a video. **NOTE:** *The video, Combat Heart Attack and Survive: Time is Life,* was distributed to VA medical centers' libraries and to each VISN.
- b. Anyone interested in obtaining additional copies of the "Time is Life for Treating Heart Attack" print materials may identify them with the following stock numbers. Contact facility supply staff to have them ordered from the Hines Service and Distribution Center.

<u>How Packed</u>	<u>Stock Numbers</u>	<u>IB Numbers</u>	<u>Title</u>
250 per pack	P95962	IB 10-170	"Time is Life" Brochure
100 per pack	P95963	IB 10-171	"Time is Life" Brochure (Spanish)
250 per pack	P95964	IB 10-172	Cardiac Risk Action Plan
250 per pack	P95965	IB 10-173	"Time is Life" Wallet card
100 per pack	P95979	IB 10-173 (SP)	"Time is Life" Wallet card (Spanish)
1 per tube	P95966	Poster 10-120	"Time is Life" Poster

c. The pdf files for printed materials can be downloaded for use from the cardiology website: <http://www.va.gov/cardiology> or VA Learning Catalog: <http://vaww.sites.lrn.va.gov/vacatalog/>

## **6. Distribution and Utilization Plan**

a. The number of copies sent to each facility was determined by identifying those veterans in the target audience with high-risk medical conditions as defined above. An initial supply of materials will be shipped to all VA parent facilities and to Associate Chiefs of Staff for Ambulatory and/or Primary Care before March 15, 2004, and the remainder will be stored for facilities to order later. **NOTE:** *Parent facilities are encouraged to distribute materials to their community based clinics.*

b. In developing local veteran health education programs, it may be helpful to involve specific groups of clinicians such as, cardiologists, acute cardiac care and rehabilitation clinicians, primary care clinicians, endocrinologists, patient education committees diabetes educators, patient advocates, public affairs officers, librarians and others who play a role in the education of the targeted group. "Time is Life for Heart Attack" products will be distributed in February 2004 to all VA facilities for use in primary care clinics, outpatient departments and inpatient units as appropriate. **NOTE:** *It is suggested that the clinicians and staff, previously identified, collaborate to determine the best education plan to include the appropriate distribution of these materials.*

c. "Time is Life for Heart Attack" materials may be displayed in the Primary Care, Cardiology Clinics and Patient Education Resource Centers. The materials need to be displayed in the VA medical facility's main lobby and distributed as handouts at local and community health fairs.

**7. Follow-up Responsibility.** Questions regarding this information letter may be addressed to Marianne Mathewson-Chapman, PhD (111) at 202-273-8517, or email [Marianne.mathewson-chapman@hq.med.va.gov](mailto:Marianne.mathewson-chapman@hq.med.va.gov) or Regina Nickerson-Taylor at 202-273-8530.

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Robert H. Roswell, M.D.  
Under Secretary for Health

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